



INSPIRING COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

**Presenter: Jeff Franco, Vice President and Executive Director,
City Year Washington, DC**

Civic Leadership

Video Transcript

[TEXT: YOUNG AFRICAN LEADERS INITIATIVE
ONLINE TRAINING SERIES]

[TEXT: Inspiring Community Participation]

[TEXT: Learning Objectives]

1. Why it's important to know your community and its needs.
2. How to overcome apathy or lack of interest.
3. How to build and maintain momentum.]

[TEXT: Jeff Franco, VP and Executive Director, City Year Washington, DC]

I'm Jeff Franco, and this is "Inspiring Community Participation" to solve local problems.

In this lesson we will learn: why it's important for you to know your community and its needs before you inspire them to act; how to overcome apathy or lack of interest from community members; and how to build and maintain momentum once you've started a project.

First, knowing your community and its needs.

It is critically important that you get to know your community intimately. What are its greatest issues and challenges? Why do they exist? Do your research and learn about the causes of the problems. Become an expert on the issues and then ask yourself, "What would it take to solve these problems?" Think big, and think creatively. People are inspired to act when there's a clear vision and they believe you have a plan of action. Do your homework; come up with a plan that is going to work. You will only be effective at inspiring others to act if you are clear about the problem you're trying to solve, and how to go about solving it.

It can be a challenge to inspire community participation and overcome apathy. It's your job to inspire the community to act! There are many reasons why community members choose not to participate. For example, there can be personal barriers. People may feel they lack the skills or knowledge to make a difference. Or, there's a lack of ownership. People feel the problem is not theirs to solve, that somebody else will take care of it.

There are many creative ways to inspire community participation, and each one starts with understanding community members and their motivations. You can trigger these motivations to create a personal link between the community member you want to engage and the issue you're trying to address. For example, if you're working to improve schools, you can reach out to parents in the community and inspire them to get involved. You could appeal to their emotions as parents, drawing a connection between the students you're serving and their own.



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A second strategy for inspiring community participation is to motivate people around a vision of what's possible. Inspire them to think big. Help them imagine what is possible if they work together. Describe what could be achieved if the community came together and solved the problem you're trying to address. It's likely that your audience will have a limited view of what's possible if they haven't given the problem or solution much thought. Inspiring them to "think big" and be part of transformational community change might be enough to motivate them to act.

Another strategy for inspiring community participation is to invite everyone to be part of finding the solution. Rather than propose a solution yourself, ask all the stakeholders to come together to discuss the problem, and collectively find a way to solve it. By increasing the level of community participation in the process, you're increasing community buy-in and likelihood that they'll see the project through to the end. When people feel involved in the process, they are more likely to stay involved for the long term.

Once you've inspired the community members to act, your next task is to maintain that momentum, keep them motivated. This can be especially challenging when you're working to address big problems that can take weeks, months or even years to solve. It can be easy for community members to become uninterested or disinvested in long-term projects because they may feel they aren't seeing results.

Celebrate small victories throughout the process, to show people that they are making a difference. You can share statistics about how many people your project has served, or how many people are involved. Or, you can share personal stories about the people you have served, and how your work has enhanced the community. In addition, make it easy for community members to stay involved. Don't lose the momentum you gained from the start. Continue to create and communicate opportunities for the community.

Incredible things can happen when communities come together to solve problems. Invest your time and energy into inspiring community participation, and I know you'll be amazed by what's possible!

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